

# The Gunmaker Of Moscow

By SYLVANUS COBB, Jr.

## CHAPTER IV. THE CHALLENGE.

In the afternoon Ruric retired to his shop, where he went at work upon a gun which had been ordered some days before. As yet he had said nothing to Paul concerning the affair of the day before since his return from the Kremlin. He asked him now, however, if any one had called.

"Only the monk," returned Paul, without seeming to consider that there was anything very important in the visit.

"Do you mean the black monk—Vladimir?" asked the young man, starting.

"Yes, my master. He called here about the middle of the forenoon. He wanted one of the small daggers with the pearl haft."

"And did you let him have one?"

"Certainly. He paid me 4 ducats for it and would have paid more had I been willing to take it."

"And did he make any conversation?"

"Yes. He asked me why the Count Damonoff came here yesterday."

"Ha! How did he know of their visit?"

"He was waiting at the inn for a sledge when he overheard the count and his companion conversing upon the subject."

"And did he ask you any questions touching the particulars?"

"Yes—many."

"And how answered you?"

"I told him the whole story, from beginning to end. I found that he knew something of their purpose from what he accidentally overheard, and, rather than have him go away full of surmises, I told him all."

"Of the message too?"

"Yes, my master. I told him all that happened, from the showing of the paper which the duke had drawn up to the departure of the angry man."

"And what did the monk say?"

Ruric asked very earnestly.

"Why, he said he knew the count and that he was a proud, reckless fellow and worth but little to society; that was all. He did not seem to care much about it anyway; only he said he should have done just as you did and that every law of justice would bear you out. He had more curiosity than interest, though I am sure all his sympathies are with you."

"Very well," returned Ruric. "It can matter but little what the monk thinks about it, though I would rather have him know the truth if he must know anything, for I would not be misunderstood."

"He understands it all now, my master, and I trust you are not offended at the liberty I took in telling him."

"Not at all, Paul; not at all."

Here the conversation dropped, and the work was resumed in silence. It was past 3 o'clock when Ruric's mother came and informed him that a gentleman in the house would speak with him.

"Is it Stephen Urzen?" asked the youth.

His mother said it was.

"Then bid him come out here."

Claudia retired, and in a few moments more the gentleman made his appearance.

"Ruric Nevel," he said, bowing very stiffly and haughtily, "I bring a message from the Count Damonoff."

"Very well, sir," returned the gunmaker proudly, "I am ready to receive it."

Thereupon Urzen drew a sealed note from his pocket and handed it to Ruric, who took it and broke the seal. He opened it and read as follows:

Ruric Nevel—An insult of the most aggravating nature has for the time leveled all distinctions of caste between us. Your blood alone can wash out the stain. I would not murder you outright, and in no other way but this can I reach you. My friend, the bearer of this, will make all arrangements. If you dare not meet me, say so, that all may know who is the coward.

Damonoff.

When Ruric had read the missive, he crushed it in his hand and gazed at its bearer some moments in the face without speaking.

"Will you answer?" asked Urzen. He spoke more softly than before, for he saw something in the gunmaker's face which he dared not provoke.

"Are you acquainted with Alaric Orsa, a lieutenant of the guard?"

"Yes, sir; I know him well."

"Then let me refer you to him. He will make all necessary arrangements, and I shall hold myself bound by his plans. I trust that is satisfactory."

"Yes, sir."

"Then you and I need have no more to say."

"Only on one point," said Urzen, with some little show of confusion. "You are the challenged party, and you will have the choice of weapons. The count has not mentioned this—mind you, he has not, but I as his friend deem it no more than right to speak of it—I trust you will choose a gentleman's weapon. In the use of the pistol or the gun he is not versed."

"While you imagine I am," said Ruric, with a contemptuous curl of the lip, for he knew that the man was lying. He could see by the fellow's very looks that Damonoff had commissioned him to broach this matter.

"Of course you are," returned Urzen.

"And the count is most excellently versed in the use of the sword, is he not?"

"He is accounted a fair swordsman."

"Aye; so I thought. But it matters not to me. The thought had not entered my mind before, save that I supposed swords would be the only weapons thought of. However, Orsa will settle it with you. I have given him no directions at all save to serve me as he thinks proper and to act upon the understanding that if I have given offense to the count I would do the same again under provocation. You understand now?"

"I do, sir," returned Urzen in a choking tone.

"Then wait a moment, and I will give you a message to Orsa."

Thus speaking, Ruric went to his desk, and upon the bottom of the missive he had received from the count he wrote:

"Dear Alaric—I send this to you by the same hand that bore it to me, and you are hereby empowered to act for me as you may deem proper. I shall be governed strictly by your arrangements."

Ruric.

Having written this, he showed it to Urzen and asked him if he would bear it to the lieutenant. An affirmative reply was given, and then, simply folding the note in the opposite way from the original fold, the gunmaker superscribed it anew to the lieutenant and handed it to his visitor. Urzen took it, and, with a stiff bow, but without speaking, he turned and left the place.

That evening about 8 o'clock a sledge drove up to Ruric's door, and Alaric Orsa entered the house. He called the youth aside and informed him that the arrangements had all

been made.

"Damonoff is in a hurry," he said, "and we have appointed the meeting at 10 o'clock tomorrow forenoon. It will take place at the bend of the river just beyond the Viska hill."

"And the weapons?" asked Ruric. "Swords," returned Orsa. "The count will bring his own, and he gives you the privilege of selecting such a one as you choose."

"I thank you, Alaric, for your kindness thus far, and you may rest assured that I shall be prompt."

"Suppose I call here in the morning for you?" suggested the visitor.

"I should be pleased to have you do so."

"I will, then. I shall be along in good season with my sledge, and we will both reach the ground together."

Thus it was arranged, and then Orsa took his leave.

When Ruric returned to his seat by the fireplace, he noticed that his mother watched him narrowly and with more than ordinary interest. He had once made up his mind that he would say nothing to his mother about the affair until it was over, but as the time was set and the hour drew nigh his mind wavered. When it was over, where might he be? But he was cut short in his reflections by the voice of his parent.

"Ruric," she said, and her voice trembled while she spoke, "you will pardon me for prying into your affairs, but I cannot hide from myself that something of more than usual moment is the matter with you. Why are these men calling to and fro? And why are you so thoughtful and moody? You know a mother's feelings, and you will pardon a mother's anxiety."

"Surely, my mother," the youth returned, gazing up for a moment and then letting his eyes droop again. At length he resumed, "I had made up my mind to tell you all ere you spoke."

There was something deep and significant in Ruric's tone, and his mother quickly caught the spark.

"What is it?" she tremblingly uttered, moving her chair nearer to her child's side.

"Listen," the young man said. And thereupon he detailed the circumstances attending the visit of the Count Damonoff to his shop. Then he told of his own visit to Rosalind and its result and then of the visit of Stephen Urzen.

"And now, my mother," he added without waiting for any reply, "you know it all. You see how I am situated. Remember, our nation has reached its present point by successful war. The soul of the nation is built upon military honor, and since our noble emperor has opened the way of advancement of the lowliest of his subjects who are brave and true the coward is looked upon with disgust upon all hands. Yet, my mother, I would have you speak."

For some moments Claudia Nevel was silent. But at length she said, while a tear glistened in her eye:

"I have given one loved being up to my country's good. Russia took my husband from me, and I could ill afford now to lose my son. Yet rather than one stain should rest upon his name I would see him dead before me. Oh, Ruric, you know whether dishonor would rest upon you were you to refuse this challenge."

"I will speak plainly, my dear mother," returned the youth in a tremulous tone, for his parent's kindness had moved him. "In my soul I should feel perfectly justified in refusing this meeting, for no principle of real honor is at stake. But were I to back out now from this I should never meet another generous look in Moscow. Every one would point the finger of scorn toward me, and the word coward would ring always in my ears. It may be a false state of things—I feel that it really is so—but how can I help it? It is the curse of all great military epochs. Battle alone makes heroes, and so all must measure their honor by the force of their arms. The count carries even now upon his brow the mark of my blow, and all will say he has a right to demand satisfaction, though I know that he provoked the quarrel on purpose. I cannot refuse him on the ground of station, for he is above me in that. I must meet him."

"Then," said the mother in a low, calm tone, but with much effort, "you shall not feel that your mother would thwart your design. If your own good judgment says so, then go. If they bring your body to me in the stern grasp of death, I shall pray for the soul that has gone and shall hope to meet you in the home of the redeemed. If you come back to me alive, I shall thank God that you are spared. But, alas, the joy will be clouded with the thought of blood upon your hands and the knowledge that my joy is another's grief!"

"No, no, my mother," cried Ruric quickly and earnestly. "I will not take a fellow being's blood upon my hand if I can avoid it. Only to save my own life will I take his. He has done all this himself—all, all. The quarrel was his own, and the first blow was his. The challenge is his,

and now is not the responsibility his also?"

"It is, my son, so far as he alone is concerned. If you have a responsibility, it must be to your own soul. But tell me, has not the emperor made some new law touching this practice of dueling?"

"Yes, but only the challenger is responsible. The party challenged is held free from blame in the eyes of the law."

"Then I shall interpose no more objections," said the mother. She tried to speak heartily, but she could not hide the fearful sadness of her heart. "Could fervent prayer avert the blow it should not fall, but I can only pray as one without power."

A long time after this was passed in silence. But the mother and son seemed to have something upon their minds which they wished to say, but dared not. But the former at length overcame her reluctance.

"Ruric, my son," she said, keeping back the tears that struggled for utterance in their silent speech, "is there any little word you would leave—any matter of moment?"

"No, no," the boy answered, speaking calmly by effort. "I am yours, and all is yours. But I shall not fall."

"Ah, be not too confident, my son. Let no such assurance lead you to forget your God. I have heard of this count. It was he who slew Rutger, and Momjako, too, he slew in the duel. He is an expert swordsman and surely means to kill you if he can."

"I am aware of that, my mother. But do you know that we are all prone to overlook our own powers when pondering upon the feats of others? I may be pardoned for assuring you that the only man who has ever yet overcome the count at the sword play was one of my own scholars. While in Spain I practiced with some of the best swordsmen in the kingdom. But, listen, I will send one word. For yourself I can tell you nothing which you do not know. But yet you may see Rosalind. If you do, tell her—But you know my soul. You can tell her as you please. But I shall not fall."

It was now late, and ere long Ruric kissed his mother and then retired to his bed.

And the widow was left alone. With her eyes she followed the retreating form of her beloved son, and when he was gone from her sight she bowed her head and sobbed aloud. When she reached her humble couch, she knelt by the side thereof and poured forth her pent-up soul to God. When her head had pressed the pillow, she tried to hope, she tried to fasten one hope in her mind, but she looked only into the night. Not one ray of light reached her struggling soul. She opened her eyes of promise in vain, for she looked into a gloom so utter that out of its depths loomed only the blackness of despair.

Sleep on, Ruric. But, oh, couldst thou know how thy fond mother's heart is racked there'd be no sleep for thee!

## TO BE CONTINUED.

### Charleston Exposition.

Charleston, S. C., Dec. 2.—Impressive religious exercises intended as a prelude to to-day's opening of the South Carolina Interstate and West Indian Exposition, were held at the exposition grounds yesterday morning. The naming of Dec. 1 as the opening day of the exposition was without consulting the calendar, and the fact that Dec. 1 was Sunday was discovered by a prompter way to fulfill the promise made in the resolution as to the opening was to hold exercises appropriate to the day. Ellison Capers, Episcopal Bishop of South Carolina, made the invocation. The exposition was formally opened to-day.

### A Big Scheme.

It is said that Senator Clark, of Montana, and Mr. F. F. Walsh, of Colorado, will join interests and form a new transcontinental railroad to California. They will meet in Washington this week to talk over the matter.

## GIRLISH FIGURES

### HOW MARRIED WOMEN MAY RETAIN THEM.

Besides, comely to the extent of sweetness, grace and symmetry, often lose these powers as soon as they are past the period of gestation impose upon them the duty of child-birth.

Properly understood, motherhood is a season of pleasant anticipation. Only in rare cases is it made so, however, without artificial aid. A liniment for outside use, is preferable to anything else.

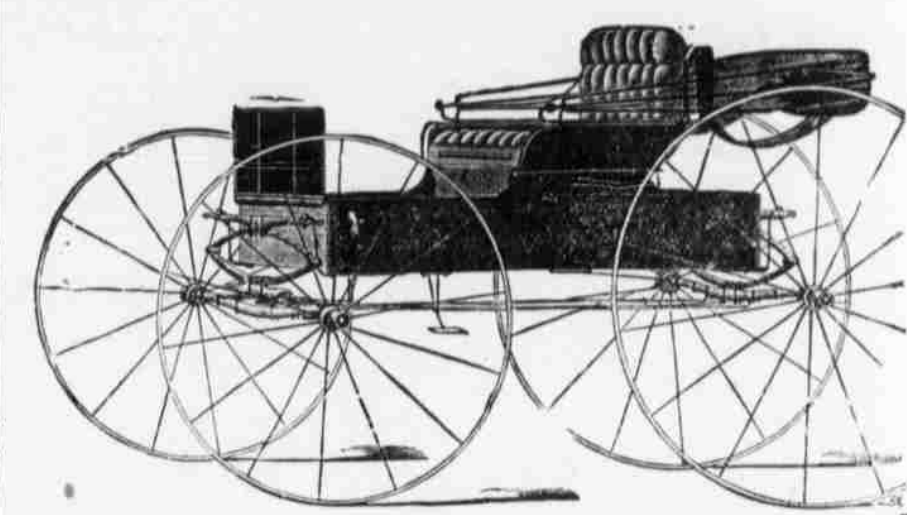
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### THE CHILD ETERNAL.

(By Irene Fowler Brown, in Harper's Magazine for October.)

I heard their prayers, and kissed their sleepy eyes. And tucked them in, all warm from feet to head.

To awake again with morning's glad sunrise. Then came where he lay dead. On cold still mouth I laid my lips.

Asleep. He lay to wake the other side God's door. My other children, mine to love and keep.

But this one mine no more. Those other children long to men have grown. Strange hurried men who give me passing thought.

Then go their ways. No longer now my own. Without me they have wrought. So when night comes, and seeking mother's knees.

Tired childish feet turn home at eventide. I fold him close—the child that's left to me. My little lad who died.

Education Your Bowels With Cascarets. Candy Cathartic, cure constipation forever. 50c. 25c. If C. C. C. fail, druggists refund money.

### Mr. Padgett Exonerated.

At the meeting of Phintias Lodge No. 37, Knights of Pythias—of which order Hon. L. P. Padgett is a member—last Friday night, the charges made against Mr. Padgett by Mr. Loyd Cecil were brought up, and one of the Knights stated that they were of such a nature that, if true, would subject him to expulsion from the lodge, and if not true he should be exonerated.

Thereupon a resolution was unanimously adopted, stating that the lodge was convinced of the high honor, integrity and manhood of Mr. Padgett, and condemning the charges made against his character by Mr. Cecil.

### Corporations Profit by Delay.

The court of last resort has finally decided that the express companies must furnish the stamp. This would be a great victory for the people were it not for the fact that the necessity for attaching a revenue stamp to express receipts was removed some time ago.

It will be noted that the express companies managed to stave off the decision until it was useless. This is a way the corporations have. But the man who mentions this interesting fact in a tone of criticism is at once dubbed an "anarchist" and accused of "attacking the courts."—The Commoner.

### Red Feathered Canaries.

M. Bourze, a Parisian canary breeder, has found a method of producing red canaries. The color is obtained by feeding the parent birds on finely ground cayenne pepper, which gradually changes the color of the feathers.

M. Bourze has already produced a red-dish, orange colored bird, and hopes in time to get a brilliantly red bird.

### Feeding Reptiles.

Snakes are very susceptible to the kind of food given them, and they prove extremely fastidious creatures when held in captivity, says the Chicago News. It is impossible to supply some of the reptiles with the special food they like, and substitutes are not taken kindly to at first. Thus the big cobras in their native haunts live chiefly on other snakes—the small harmless varieties. It is manifestly impossible to secure sufficient small snakes to supply these voracious eaters at all seasons of the year. Nevertheless, the keepers of the Central Park menagerie, New York, make great efforts to collect small snakes for the valuable cobras. These come from different points in considerable numbers, shipments often amounting to as high as 150 at a time. Fed on these live snakes the cobras thrive in captivity and appear satisfied with their lot; but it becomes necessary to appease their appetite with rats and mice when snakes are scarce. While new cobras will not touch these rodents when they are first placed before them, they can sometimes be enticed to swallow them when tied to the tail of a small snake or even when stuffed in the skin of a dead reptile. Other snakes are fed mostly on toads, mice and rabbits. Even English sparrows are purchased in considerable numbers for the reptiles. The average prices paid each year for these snake foods are 2 cents each for sparrows, 1 to 5 cents for toads and frogs and 2 to 3 cents for live mice. At these quotations many boys make quite a little pocket money, and the park managers find the supply at times greater than the demand, so eager are the youngsters to feed the snakes. In the winter season, however, it sometimes becomes a question of considerable importance how to secure fresh food for the reptiles. At one time more than a dozen rattlesnakes had to be killed because of the keepers' inability to find plenty of live mice to keep them from starvation.

### HOW'S THIS.

We offer one hundred dollars reward for any case of Catarrh that can not be cured by Hall's Catarrh Cure.

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### A Paying Sport.

Yale's gate receipts for the foot ball season will reach the handsome total of about \$75,000. The game with Harvard alone, which had 40,000 spectators, added \$35,000 to the foot ball earnings of Old Eli's sons. The game with Princeton was worth \$15,000 to them. From the eleven other games they netted \$25,000. So that the average gross earnings of a first-class college foot ball team is about \$5,800 per game.—New York World.

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